

C-SAP Open Cascade project

Parlez-vous OER? Open Educational Resources in multilingual contexts

Posted on [March 3, 2011](#) by [Anna Gruszczynska](#)

As mentioned earlier in a [series of posts on project progress](#), our cascade partners are busy creating/repurposing their OERs, with the process bringing up quite interesting issues related to our partners' specific institutional contexts. For instance, one of issues which became quite prominent for our Welsh colleagues from Bangor and Cardiff is that of creating teaching resources in a minority language. They are currently working on repurposing a number of resources into Welsh, which include an [SPSS OpenLearn module](#) and as well as a series of short video clips on research methods in social sciences, to be incorporated into the [MA in Language Policy and Planning](#).

Some of the discussion on non-English OERs centres on the accessibility and relevance of OER materials in non-Western settings, with concerns being raised about the risk of [New Colonialism](#) in OER, with the materials bearing implicit educational values of the West/global North. A number of those concerns are mentioned in a blog post by Graham Attwell who warns about the risks of OERs contributing to the process of marginalisation, rather than empowerment of non-Western learners and asks at "[what point do OERs and open education become part of a post-colonial discourse focused upon new markets](#)"?

At present, English-language content dominates the OER landscape. Approaches to allow for provision of multi-language OERs include initiatives such as [Universia](#), a consortium that maintains higher education portals for Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries, and [CORE \(China Open Resources for Education\)](#), a consortium of Chinese universities with the mission to enhance quality education in China. Both initiatives began their involvement with OER by translating [MIT's OpenCourseWare courses](#) and wherever necessary, adapting the materials to the local cultural and pedagogical context (by the way, a recent blog post on [OER reuse and repurposing](#) by the Leicester Beyond Distance Research Alliance makes quite an interesting reading in this context!). As the collaborators involved in the "[Conversations in cyberspace](#)" (a [UNESCO internet forum on open education organised in 2005](#)) argue, the reliance on translation can magnify some of the problems inherent in OER production, such as issues around [quality assurance or the reluctance of universities to use course material not generated within that institution](#).

Yet another approach to multi-language OER provision has been adopted by repositories which are primarily English-based but make an effort to ensure that the content is available in other languages. Those include for instance Rice University-based [Connexions](#) where volunteers are translating modules and courses into a variety of different languages, including Spanish, Japanese, Chinese, and Thai or [temoa](#) (Tecnológico de Monterrey System) which, according to its mission statement, [functions as a public and multilingual catalogue of OERs](#). Another initiative worth mentioning is the [Multilingual Open Resources for Independent Learning](#) project initiated by the [European Association of Distance Teaching Universities \(EADTU\)](#) where participating members can submit resources in their own languages. Apart from those big projects, involved in producing "[big OERs](#)", there are also examples of less formal initiatives. For instance, [Stian Haklev explores a vision of a multicultural classroom](#) where students from a variety of language/cultural backgrounds would engage with OERs as users and producers. In the spirit of "little OERs", students would contribute articles in their own language to Wikipedia or create blog posts about their learning experiences. This approach would also fit neatly within our own efforts to embed student engagement within the cascade framework

OWN EFFORTS TO EMBED STUDENT ENGAGEMENT WITHIN THE CASCADE FRAMEWORK.

Obviously, this blog post will not be able to do justice to the numerous challenges of offering courses in a bilingual teaching context, in particular the need to address [a wide linguistic variety of native speakers and learners of Welsh](#) (however, there is some excellent research being undertaken by [ESRC Centre for Research on Bilingualism in Theory and Practice](#), alternatively, the [Education Subject Centre team](#) have made available a brief yet succinct overview [Welsh Language use: from Primary to Higher Education](#)). Our colleagues involved in the project already have experience of producing and sharing Welsh-medium online resources in the context of the [Y Porth](#) (literally “the gateway”), which is a collaborative e-learning platform and a central repository for the Welsh medium Higher Education sector. At the same time, resources within Y Porth are not truly open as they can only be accessed by students and members of staff from Welsh institutions. It will be quite fascinating to see what issues will emerge in the process of releasing those materials “into the open” and beyond the walled garden of the Welsh resource gateway.